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# C THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

## *Experimental Klingle trail is costly, unwise*

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### **VIEWPOINT**

**WILLIAM H. CARROLL      FEBRUARY 2, 2011**

In 2008, without benefit of a public hearing, the D.C. Council directed the mayor to close the barricaded segment of Klingle Road to motorized traffic, tear up the pavement and build a 10-foot-wide, permeable-surface hike/bike path.

At an informal transportation committee roundtable, hike/bike advocates proffered \$2 million as the trail cost and claimed that rebuilding the road would cost \$18 million. The environmental assessment released by the Federal Highway Administration and the D.C. Department of Transportation on Jan. 13 demonstrates the folly of those claims and the council's legislation.

For starters, the document's \$6.8 million cost estimate for the hike/bike path is outlandish by any standard and outrageous in this era of governmental belt tightening. And the recommended trail does not even resolve issues raised by other government agencies.

Transportation officials issued a draft environmental assessment in June 2010. The next month, the D.C. Department of the Environment responded by saying that steep slopes make the permeable pavement options inappropriate for the valley.

The 2008 legislation overlooked the fact that the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority and Washington Gas have facilities along the trail route that must be accessed by heavy vehicles. In response to the draft environmental assessment, the water authority asserted that the trail must be available for vehicles and associated equipment weighing approximately 47,000 pounds and measuring 32 feet by 8 feet by 12 feet.

The 2011 document responds only to vehicle width, stating that there will be 2-foot shoulders on either side of the 10-foot trail. The Transportation Department ignored the more significant weight factor.

The city environmental agency, backing away from its slope concerns, is asserting its authority to weigh in during design reviews as construction proceeds and offering to assist in finding additional funds that may be necessary. In other words, taxpayers are being asked to fund a \$6.8 million, experimental-technology trail that will probably wash out or end up requiring more money for fixes.

The trail will also cost the District hundreds of thousands in lost income and property tax revenues (not to mention money spent on threatened litigation) because it landlocks five lots fronting Klingle that were approved for residential development in an agreement approved by the Mayor's Agent for Historic Preservation. The environmental assessment dismisses this loss, relying on an obtuse letter from the D.C. Historic Preservation Office noting that, when the agreement was signed in 2006, the road was barricaded.

The Transportation Department ignores much more relevant evidence of the extent of the revenue lost by making the lots undevelopable: In 2006, D.C. law mandated repair and reopening of Klingle Road; a 2005 preliminary environmental impact statement by the Federal Highway Administration and the D.C. Transportation Department recommended restoring Klingle Road to its pre-collapse two-lane configuration; and in 2008, the D.C. Council accepted testimony identifying property and income taxes to be derived from residential development of the five lots as an offset to tax relief enacted under the Tregaron Conservancy Tax Relief and Exemption Act.

The June 2010 environmental assessment announced that closing Klingle Road would have to comply with the District's Street and Alley Closing Act, including its public hearing provision. The Federal Highway Administration and the D.C. Department of Transportation now state that the June announcement was in error. The agencies now claim that, because the 2008 legislation did not find the barricaded section of Klingle Road to be unnecessary, it is not being closed.

This is brazen sophistry. The Street and Alley Closing Act allows the D.C. Council to determine whether a road is necessary after a public hearing. The 2008 legislation was enacted without a public hearing and specifies no other mechanism for determining whether the barricaded segment is necessary. No street in D.C. is safe from closing without a public hearing under the agencies' distorted reasoning.

The January environmental assessment estimates the cost of rebuilding the vehicular road at \$10 million. Clearly, in the context of one city, many more D.C. residents would benefit from continuing to use the road to connect to schools, churches and hospitals. Nevertheless, trail advocates will seek momentum from this flawed document regardless of its costly, technical defects because it suits their goal of keeping Klingle Road closed to motor vehicles. Mayor Vincent Gray and Council Chairman Kwame Brown should stop this hike/bike trail immediately and submit the cost, technical and road-closing issues to a public hearing.

**William H. Carroll is a North Cleveland Park resident.**